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ABSTRACT

During the fall of 1979, PROBE (Practical Research into Organizational Behavior and Effectiveness), an independent research organization, undertook a survey of public school district superintendents to elicit their views on education in areas parallel to those expressed in the annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward the schools. A one-page questionnaire was directed to two slightly overlapping samples: a stratified random sample of 2,004 district superintendents and superintendents in the nation's 200 most populous school districts. Both the random and large district samples were in complete agreement on the top four problems confronting public school districts: inflation and financial support, declining enrollment, governmental restrictions, and handicapped education requirements. Negative correlations were found between both samples' problem rankings and those of the Gallup Poll. Discipline, for example, was rated first in 10 of the last 11 years in the Gallup Poll but it was rated thirteenth by the superintendents. Among the major conclusions drawn were that the nation's schools are in need of improved financial support, that both administrators and the public desire improvements in teacher quality, and that a formidable task remains for advocates of handicapped education if they are to convince administrators and the public of the value of mainstreaming. (Author/IRT)

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A PROBE * REPORT:
SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEWS ON EDUCATION vs. THE GALLUP POLL

Jerry Duea and Walter L. Bishop

During each of the past eleven years (beginning in 1969), the Gallup Poll has undertaken surveys of lay attitudes toward public education under the sponsorship of the Kettering Foundation. In turn, the findings have been reported as an annual feature of the Phi Delta Kappan.

The findings of these polls have received considerable attention in other media and many have come to accept them as the "truth" about what is wrong with public education in America. And one scarcely can overestimate the influence these polls' findings have had in promoting certain educational developments, especially the "back to basics movement" and the institution of magnet schools founded on educational approaches and disciplinary standards more characteristic of earlier eras.

Surprisingly, little previous evidence exists of comprehensive attempts to collect and analyze professional educators' views parallel to the lay opinions solicited and reported by the Gallup polls.

During the fall of 1979, PROBE undertook a survey of public school district superintendents to elicit their views on education parallel to the lay opinions expressed in the annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools. Two sample groups were involved: (1) a stratified random sample of superintendents in 2004 of the nation's public schools; and (2) superintendents of the 200 most populous school districts in the United States.

A one-page self-return questionnaire was designed for the study. It was distributed in two mailings in October and November, 1979.

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*PROBE is an acronym for Practical Research into Organizational Behavior and Effectiveness. This independent research organization is headquartered on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The authors co-direct the agency's operations; Dr. Duea is director of research and Dr. Bishop serves as director of the organization's education division. Both the Graduate College and the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa allocated research funds in support of this project.

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Results

Response

A total of 1272 responses were received in the PROBE national survey. One thousand, one hundred fifty-four of these were included in the random sample and 133 were from superintendents in the nation's 200 most populous school districts; response rates were 57.6 and 66.5 percent respectively. Statistical analyses indicated that random sample selections and returns were highly representative of the nation's public schools in terms of enrollment proportions. (chi square = .0056 at 8 df)

Table 1 shows other characteristics associated with respondents to the PROBE Survey of District Superintendents and the school districts they represented.

Major Problems Confronting Public Schools

Participants in the study were asked to "identify the five most important problems confronting your school district today. (Rank them in the order of their significance. . .)." Seventeen commonly encountered problems and two blanks for recording other responses were provided. Table 2 shows the results.

Considerable agreement was shown between the problem ratings by superintendents in the random and large district samples. In fact, complete agreement was found in the first four problems identified by the two groups: (1) inflation and financial support; (2) declining enrollment: (3) governmental restriction; and (4) handicapped education requirements.

Inflation and financial support clearly is the leading problem being confronted by public school administrators as evidenced by the ratings of superintendents in both the random and large district groups. This problem was identified by over thirty percent more of the respondents in each sample group than was declining enrollment which ranked second.

Points were awarded for the problems identified in order to get a better indication of their relative severity. Five points were awarded each time a problem was ranked first, four points were awarded for second place rankings, three for third, two for fourth, one for fifth, and no points were awarded when the problem was ignored by a respondent. Mean scores were thus determined. Inflation and financial support was even more clearly the leading problem on the basis of mean scores. It held almost a two-to-one advantage over the second ranking problem in each instance.

Statistical analyses revealed a high degree of correlation between the random and large district samples with a Pearson r of .931 based on mean score comparisons.

Table 1 Other Characteristics of Respondents and the Districts They Represented

Characteristics	Random Sample (n=1154) No.	Pct.	Large Districts (n=133) No.	Pct.
A. Respondent Characteristics				
1. Position/title:				
Superintendent	998	86.6	104	78.2
Other*	154	13.3	27	20.3
Unidentified	2	0.2	2	1.5
2. Sex:				
Male	1106	95.8	126	94.7
Female	44	3.8	6	4.5
Unidentified	3	0.3	1	0.8
3. Ethnicity:				
Black	3	0.3	8	6.0
Caucasian	1055	91.4	113	85.0
Spanish	8	0.7	3	2.3
Other	22	1.9	5	3.8
Unidentified	66	5.7	4	3.0
4. Educational degree status:				
BA/BS	32	2.8	2	1.5
MA/MS	562	48.7	27	20.3
Ed. S.	238	20.6	10	7.5
Ed. D.	227	19.7	66	49.6
Ph. D.	88	7.6	27	20.3
Unidentified	7	0.6	1	0.8
B. District Characteristics				
1. School district type:				
Inner City	6	0.5	8	6.0
Urban	79	6.8	74	55.6
Suburban	242	21.0	39	29.3
Rural	797	69.1	0	----
Unidentified	30	2.6	12	9.0
2. Levels encompassed by district:				
Elementary	168	14.6	1	0.8
Secondary	31	2.7	3	2.3
Elementary and Secondary (unified)	948	82.1	127	95.5
Unidentified	1	0.1	1	0.8
3. Population of largest community in the district:				
2500 or less	591	51.2	0	----
2501 to 20,000	402	34.8	5	3.8
20,001 to 50,000	105	9.1	7	5.3
50,001 to 200,000	38	3.3	57	42.9
Over 200,000	12	1.0	61	45.9
Unidentified	6	0.5	3	2.3

*Ninety-two respondents who marked "other" for title failed to record what their titles were. The other titles most frequently mentioned were: principal (23), assistant/deputy superintendent (16), head teacher (8), administrative assistant (6), unspecified administrator (6), and director of curriculum/instruction (5).

Table 2 Major Problems Confronting Public Schools

Problems	PROBE Survey Findings: Random Sample (n = 1154) Rank	Pct.	Mean** Score	Large Districts (n = 133) Rank	Pct.*	Mean** Score	1979 Gallup Poll Rank	Pct.
Inflation and financial support	1	82.1	3.32	1	87.2	3.65	3	12
Declining enrollment	2	47.8	1.76	2	54.9	1.99	20	1
Governmental restrictions	3	57.5	1.72	3	46.6	1.29	14.5	2
Handicapped educ. requirements	4	43.4	1.25	4	44.4	1.27	----	--
Parents' lack of interest	5	43.2	1.13	6	29.3	0.88	10.5	3
Facility inadequacy	6	33.7	1.09	9	21.8	0.64	14.5	2
Securing good teachers	7	32.9	0.88	8	27.8	0.74	5	10
Pupils' lack of interest	8	31.5	0.84	10	21.1	0.44	8	4
Other***	9	15.9	0.44	7	24.8	0.76	----	--
Student absenteeism	10	14.6	0.37	12	15.8	0.37	8	4
Teachers' lack of interest	11	15.6	0.36	15	13.5	0.26	10.5	3
Student drinking/alcoholism	12	15.4	0.34	14	12.0	0.29	14.5	2
Lack of discipline	13	13.4	0.33	13	14.3	0.31	1	24
Student drug usage	14	12.7	0.27	17	12.8	0.23	2	13
Poor curriculum/low standards	15	8.8	0.23	16	7.5	0.24	4	11
Teacher absenteeism	16	9.4	0.22	11	18.0	0.40	----	--
Crime and vandalism	17	9.1	0.21	18	10.5	0.20	8	4
Racial integration/bussing	18	2.7	0.07	5	27.8	0.91	6	9

*The percent column indicates the percentage of respondents that identified each problem as one of the top five problems confronting their districts.

**Mean scores were computed by awarding 5 points each time a problem was ranked first, 4 points for second rankings, 3 points for third, 2 points for fourth, one point for fifth rankings, and 0 for each time a problem was ignored by a respondent. The mean score was derived by dividing by the sample number (1154 for the random sample, and 133 for the large district sample).

***The problems most frequently mentioned under "other" were as follows: negotiations and unionism (identified by 34 respondents), public relations problems (17), lack of local control (13), increasing enrollment (11), school board interference (11), and transportation (11).

A negative relationship was found to exist between the problem ratings in the 1979 Gallup Poll and those by the participants in the two PROBE samples (both the random and large district samples). For the fifteen problem areas common to both surveys, the rank difference correlations between the Gallup Poll problem ratings and those of superintendents in the PROBE random and large district samples were -.421 and -.262 respectively. While neither of these correlation coefficients was statistically significant at the .05 level (largely due to the limited number of comparisons involved), they do serve to point up the disparities between professional and lay opinions on education as represented by the findings of the two polls.

Even more dramatic evidence of the differences between professional and lay opinions is provided by comparisons of individual problem areas in the findings of the PROBE and Gallup polls. Whereas lack of discipline ranked first in the 1979 Gallup Poll for the tenth time in eleven years, it ranked a distant thirteenth in the ratings of both the PROBE random and large district samples. Similarly, student drug usage which ranked second in the Gallup Poll was ranked fourteenth by superintendents in the random sample, and it was ranked seventeenth by large district superintendents.

Among the top five ranking problems in the two polls, the only areas approaching agreement were inflation and financial support (ranked first by both groups of superintendents and third in the Gallup Poll) and racial integration/bussing (ranked fifth by large district superintendents and sixth in the Gallup Poll). While some agreement was found in the case of racial integration and bussing, it should be noted that this area was ranked eighteenth and last by superintendents in the PROBE random sample.

Problem ratings by subgroups based on enrollment and district type are shown in Tables 3 and 4. Correlations between the various subgroup ratings in each of the tables ranged from a low of .768 to a high of .968. The highest degree of agreement was found between the ratings of subgroups based on district type where correlation coefficients ranged from .958 to .967.

On the basis of these statistics, it may be concluded that school district problems are subject to very little influence from enrollment and district characteristics. The major problems appear to affect small and large districts and rural, urban and suburban districts in like manners, and with almost equal severity.

Table 3 Major Problems Confronting Public Schools by Enrollment Groups (Based on the PROBE random sample)

	Enrollment Subgroups														
	999- (n=555)			1000-4999 (n=456)			5000-9999 (n=85)			10,000-24,999 (n=43)			25,000+ (n=15)		
Problems	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score
Inflation and financial support	1	80.5	3.16	1	83.8	3.46	1	81.2	3.48	1	81.4	3.56	1	93.3	3.93
Declining enrollment	2	53.2	1.98	3	41.4	1.48	2	48.2	1.72	2	51.2	2.02	6	33.3	1.33
Governmental restrictions	3	57.8	1.75	2	58.1	1.73	4	39.4	1.49	3	65.1	1.81	3	53.3	1.53
Handicapped educ. requirements	6	38.7	1.11	4	46.9	1.34	3	52.9	1.58	4	41.9	1.16	2	60.0	1.87
Parents' lack of interest	4	47.0	1.25	5	40.4	1.06	5	42.4	1.08	9	25.6	0.54	5	46.7	1.27
Facility inadequacy	5	35.0	1.13	6	33.3	1.10	6	31.8	0.94	5	32.6	0.95	16.5	13.3	0.13
Securing good teachers	7	40.7	1.09	8	27.9	0.76	9	18.8	0.49	7	20.9	0.58	16.5	13.3	0.13
Pupils' lack of interest	8	35.1	0.97	7	30.9	0.82	11	18.8	0.38	11	20.9	0.47	15	13.3	0.27
Other**	10	13.3	0.34	12	16.7	0.48	7	22.4	0.67	6	25.6	0.70	4	40.0	1.33
Student absenteeism	9	14.4	0.38	13	14.7	0.36	8	20.0	0.58	17	4.7	0.12	14	13.3	0.33
Teachers' lack of interest	11	13.9	0.31	10	18.4	0.45	17	8.2	0.20	10	25.6	0.47	18	6.7	0.13
Student drinking/alcoholism	14	11.9	0.25	9	19.7	0.44	13	16.5	0.35	16	7.0	0.19	8	33.3	0.87
Lack of discipline	12	12.4	0.29	15	13.2	0.34	14	15.3	0.35	8	16.3	0.56	7	40.0	0.87
Student drug usage	15	7.6	0.16	11	16.9	0.37	12	20.0	0.37	13	16.3	0.33	11	20.0	0.47
Poor curriculum/low standards	13	11.4	0.29	17	6.8	0.19	18	7.1	0.15	18	2.3	0.05	9.5	20.0	.53
Teacher absenteeism	17	4.5	0.11	14	13.8	0.32	15	12.9	0.31	15	16.3	0.30	12.5	13.3	0.40
Crime/vandalism	16	7.0	0.15	16	9.9	0.23	10	16.5	0.42	14	11.6	0.33	12.5	13.3	0.40
Racial integration/bussing	18	1.3	0.03	18	2.2	0.04	16	5.9	0.21	12	14.0	0.47	9.5	20.0	0.53

*See mean score explanation in Table 2.

**See "other" entries identified in Table 2.

Table 4 Problem Ratings by Superintendent Subgroups Based on District Types

	Inner City/Urban (n=85)			Suburban (n=242)			Rural (n=797)		
	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*
Inflation and financial Support	1	80.0	3.24	1	85.1	3.46	1	81.2	3.28
Declining enrollment	2	48.2	1.71	2	54.5	2.09	3	46.0	1.66
Governmental restrictions	4	48.2	1.42	3	59.5	1.85	2	58.1	1.72
Handicapped educ. requirements	3	48.2	1.52	4	47.5	1.30	4	41.9	1.21
Parents' lack of interest	5	44.7	1.19	6	35.5	0.91	5	45.7	1.19
Facility inadequacy	6	30.6	0.93	5	28.9	0.93	6	35.3	1.15
Securing good teachers	11	20.0	0.52	7	23.6	0.60	7	37.6	1.02
Pupils' lack of interest	7	30.6	0.87	11	16.9	0.41	8	36.0	0.97
Other**	10	20.0	0.56	8	19.4	0.52	10	13.9	0.39
Student absenteeism	9	18.8	0.57	16	11.2	0.25	9	15.2	0.39
Teachers' lack of interest	8	25.9	0.60	10	17.8	0.44	13	13.7	0.30
Student drinking/alcoholism	14	15.3	0.35	9	21.9	0.47	11	13.6	0.31
Lack of discipline	13	16.5	0.40	14	13.6	0.34	12	12.8	0.31
Student drug usage	16	16.5	0.31	15	15.7	0.31	15	11.2	0.25
Teacher absenteeism	12	20.0	0.47	12	14.5	0.36	17	6.8	0.15
Poor curriculum/low standards	18	3.5	0.09	17	6.2	0.14	14	10.2	0.27
Crime and vandalism	17	14.1	0.31	13	14.0	0.36	16	7.2	0.16
Racial integration/bussing	15	12.9	0.35	18	3.7	0.09	18	1.3	0.04

*See mean score explanation in Table 2.

**See "other" explanation in Table 2.

Ratings of Public Schools

Consistent with the 1979 Gallup Poll, participants in the PROBE Survey of District Superintendents were asked to grade the schools they administer. The item read as follows: "Overall, and as impartially as possible, how would you grade your district's schools?" The options A,B,C,D, and F were provided. Table 5 shows the results obtained with various subgroups.

Table 5 Administrator Ratings of Public Schools by Various Subgroups in the PROBE Survey of District Superintendents

		Letter Grades					
Sample of Group	No Response Pct.	A Pct.	B Pct.	C Pct.	D Pct.	F Pct.	G.P.A.
PROBE Random Sample	0.0	20.8	62.6	14.5	1.3	1.2	3.00
Large District Sample	1.5	24.8	60.2	12.0	1.5	0.8	3.08
1979 Gallup Poll	18	8	26	30	11	7	2.20
Random Sample Subgroups Enrollment subgroups:							
999 or less	0.0	16.0	60.2	19.5	2.2	2.2	2.86
1000 to 4999	0.0	21.9	67.3	9.9	0.4	0.4	3.10
5000 to 9999	0.0	38.8	48.2	11.8	0.0	0.0	3.25
10,000 to 24,999	0.0	30.2	62.8	7.0	0.0	0.0	3.23
25,000 or more	0.0	33.3	60.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	3.27
District type subgroups							
Inner city/urban	0.0	18.8	63.5	14.1	2.4	1.2	2.94
Suburban	0.0	37.7	56.5	5.8	0.0	0.0	3.32
Rural	0.0	15.6	64.1	17.6	1.5	1.3	2.91

Superintendents were considerably more charitable in assigning letter grades to the schools in their districts than were the lay persons who participated in the Gallup Poll. Slightly over sixty percent of the superintendents who reported assigned grades of "B" to their schools as compared to twenty-six percent of the participants in the Gallup Poll. Grade point averages (G.P.A.) on a four-point scale were as follows: PROBE large district sample--3.08; PROBE random sample--3.00: Gallup Poll--2.20.

Two trends were evidenced: (1) the larger the district enrollment, the higher the grades assigned by superintendents; (2) suburban superintendents were inclined to grade their schools higher than their counterparts in rural and inner city/urban districts.

How Today's Schools and Their Programs Compare with Those in the Past

Participants in the survey were asked the question: "How do the present schools in your district (and their programs) compare with the ones to which you were exposed as a student?" The reponse options included better today, worse today, about the same, and I am undecided. Table 6 summarizes the responses of various subgroups in the PROBE survey and the findings of the 1979 Gallup Poll.

Table 6 Sample and Subgroup Comparisons of Opinions Regarding Past and Present Schools and Programs

		Ratings of Past and Present Schools			
Sample/Group	No Response Pct.	Better today Pct.	Worse today Pct.	About the same Pct.	Undecided Pct.
PROBE Random Sample	1.7	77.2	12.0	6.1	2.9
Large District Sample	1.5	75.9	11.3	9.0	2.3
1979 Gallup poll	---	41	42	9	8
Random Sample Subgroups					
Enrollment subgroups:					
999 or less	2.2	71.5	14.2	8.5	3.6
1000 to 4999	1.1	82.7	10.3	3.5	2.4
5000 to 9999	3.5	81.2	9.4	3.5	2.4
10,000 to 24,999	0.0	81.4	9.3	7.0	2.3
25,000 or over	0.0	86.7	6.7	6.7	0.0
District type subgroups:					
Inner city/urban	1.2	77.6	12.9	7.1	1.2
Suburban	2.5	83.5	7.0	3.3	3.7
Rural	1.5	74.9	13.8	7.0	2.8

In general, district superintendents appeared to hold present day public schools in considerably higher esteem than the lay persons who participated in

the 1979 Gallup Poll. The superintendents in the PROBE random and large district samples who rated today's schools superior to those in the past exceeded the percentage of participants in the Gallup Poll who did by approximately thirty-five percent or more (77.2 and 75.9 percent vs. 41 percent for the Gallup Poll participants).

As with the grades assigned to their schools, superintendents representing districts with enrollments under 999 were somewhat less complimentary of today's schools than were their colleagues in more populous districts; 71.5 percent of the smaller district superintendents rated today's schools better whereas from 81.2 to 86.7 percent of those representing districts with enrollments over 1000 rated their schools in a like manner. Similarly, superintendents from suburban districts again had a more positive outlook toward their schools; 83.5 percent of them rated their schools better today compared to 74.9 percent of the rural district representatives and 77.6 percent of those from inner city/urban districts.

Ways to Improve Public Schools

In an effort to determine the improvements most needed in the public schools, participants in the PROBE survey were presented with the following item: "Identify the three changes that would do the most to improve the quality of your district's schools. (Rank your choices; put the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in the blanks that correspond with them.)" Eleven commonly needed, potential improvements plus a blank for recording other entries were provided.

Comparisons of the findings with superintendents in the random and large district samples and the findings of the 1979 Gallup Poll appear in Table 7. Tables 8 and 9 give subgroup findings based on enrollment and district type.

Both the random and large district samples and all subgroups agreed on the top two improvements most needed by public schools; they were: (1) increase financial support, a runaway for first place, and (2) improve the quality of teachers. Beyond these, intergroup rankings vary.

The area of greatest agreement between the PROBE survey and the Gallup Poll lay in the realm of improving teacher quality which ranked first in the Gallup Poll and second in the PROBE survey. Very little agreement existed between the two surveys on the matter of improved discipline; it ranked second in the Gallup Poll, tenth in the PROBE random sample, and eleventh in the large district sample. The ranks of improved discipline ranged from seventh to eleventh in the ratings of various subgroups.

Table 7 Improvements Needed in the Public Schools

Improvements Needed	PROBE Samples: Random Sample (n=1154) Rank	Pct.*	Mean** Score	Large Districts (n=133) Rank	Pct.*	Mean** Score	Gallup Poll Ranks
Increase financial support	1	68.8	1.72	1	76.7	1.86	-
Improve the quality of teachers	2	42.1	0.85	2	45.1	0.98	1
Upgrade school facilities	3	30.6	0.59	9	15.8	0.21	-
Increase individual attention	4	30.6	0.56	6	21.1	0.34	4
Improve relations with parents	5	28.2	0.49	5	24.1	0.45	7
Raise academic standards	6	21.6	0.39	4	25.6	0.51	3
Improve management and direction	7	18.5	0.33	3	27.8	0.51	6
Update the curriculum	8	18.6	0.30	12	9.0	0.17	-
Eliminate alcohol/drug usage	9	14.3	0.24	10	13.5	0.21	-
Increase/improve discipline	10	13.3	0.22	11	12.8	0.18	2
Reduce class size	11	9.4	0.16	7	19.5	0.31	-
Other***	12	7.1	0.14	8	9.8	0.23	-

*The percent column indicated the percentage of respondents that identified each area of improvement as one of the top three needed in their districts.

**Mean scores were computed by awarding 3 points each time a choice was ranked first, 2 points for each second ranking, 1 point for each third ranking, and 0 each time a choice was ignored. The mean score was derived by dividing by the sample number (1154 for the random sample and 133 for the large district sample which represents the nation's 200 most populous school districts).

***The improvements most frequently mentioned under "other" were as follows: improve local control (29), improve public relations (18), secure better board members (10), provide improved inservice for staff (7), and reduce office routine and paper work (6).

The Pearson r coefficients derived from comparisons of the potential improvement ratings of the random sample, the large district sample, and the various subgroups closely approximated those for problem ratings. The correlation between the random sample and large district ratings was .936; coefficients for the subgroups based on enrollment and district types ranged from .895 to .966. All were statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 8 Improvements Needed in the Public Schools by Enrollment Subgroups (based on the PROBE random sample)

	Enrollment Subgroups														
	999- (n=555)			1000-4999 (n=456)			5000-9999 (n=85)			10,000-24,999 (n=43)			25,000+ (n=15)		
Improvements Needed	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score	Rank	Pct.	Mean* Score
Increase financial support	1	68.1	1.71	1	69.5	1.72	1	67.1	1.74	1	67.4	1.63	1	86.7	2.20
Improve the quality of teachers	2	37.3	0.75	2	46.3	0.96	2	44.7	0.79	2	58.1	1.16	2	33.3	0.87
Upgrade school facilities	3	34.6	0.68	4	29.6	0.56	7	17.6	0.31	6	16.3	0.40	4.5	26.7	0.40
Increase individual attention	4	32.4	0.58	3	30.7	0.56	4	25.9	0.52	7	20.9	0.35	9.5	13.3	0.27
Improve relations with parents	5	30.5	0.54	5	26.3	0.44	5	25.9	0.45	4	27.9	0.49	6	20.0	0.40
Raise academic standards	6	25.6	0.49	8	17.3	0.28	11	14.1	0.25	5	23.3	0.40	3	40.0	0.67
Improve management and direction	8	16.0	0.27	6	19.1	0.34	3	25.9	0.53	3	32.6	0.53	11	6.7	0.07
Update the curriculum	7	22.0	0.34	9	16.2	0.26	8	16.5	0.29	11	7.0	0.16	9.5	13.3	0.27
Eliminate alcohol/drug usage	10	10.1	0.17	7	18.0	0.31	6	21.2	0.36	10	14.0	0.21	7.5	20.0	0.27
Increase and improve discipline	9	13.2	0.21	10	12.1	0.21	9	17.6	0.27	8	18.6	0.30	7.5	20.0	0.27
Reduce class sizes	12	6.3	0.11	11	11.0	0.18	10	15.3	0.27	9	14.0	0.23	4.5	26.7	0.40
Other	11	5.9	0.12	12	8.3	0.17	12	9.4	0.15	12	7.0	0.14	12	0.0	0.0

*See mean score explanation in Table 7.

**See "other" entries identified in Table 7.

Table 9 Improvements Needed in the Public Schools by Subgroups Based on School District Type (from the PROBE random sample)

	District Type Subgroups								
	Inner City/Urban (n=85)			Suburban (n=242)			Rural (n=797)		
	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*	Rank	Pct.	Mean Score*
Increase financial support	1	64.7	1.55	1	68.6	1.71	1	69.3	1.73
Improve quality of teachers	2	49.1	1.01	2	46.3	0.98	2	40.7	0.81
Upgrade school facilities	4	27.1	0.46	5	20.7	0.41	3	34.0	0.66
Increase individual attention	5	21.2	0.42	3	33.9	0.61	4	30.7	0.56
Improve relations with parents	3	32.9	0.58	6	23.6	0.39	5	29.2	0.51
Raise academic standards	6	22.4	0.40	7	20.7	0.35	6	21.8	0.40
Improve management and direction	7	22.4	0.39	4	25.2	0.45	8	16.2	0.28
Update the curriculum	11	12.9	0.18	9	15.3	0.28	7	20.5	0.32
Eliminate alcohol/drug usage	9	17.7	0.32	8	17.8	0.29	10	12.4	0.21
Increase and improve discipline	8	23.5	0.38	11	12.0	0.20	9	12.8	0.21
Reduce class sizes	10	12.9	0.25	10	13.6	0.22	12	7.2	0.12
Other	12	5.9	0.18	12	7.9	0.15	11	6.9	0.13

*See mean score explanation in Table 7.

**See "other" entries identified in Table 7.

Federal Aid to Education

Participants in the study were also asked to estimate the effects of federal aid in their districts. The following item was used to elicit these views:

> How has federal aid to education affected the programs in your district?
>
> _____It definitely has had a positive effect
>
> _____Its effects have been somewhat positive
>
> _____Its benefits and liabilities have balanced out
>
> _____It has been more trouble than it is worth

The results appear in Table 10.

Table 10 Superintendents Views on Federal Aid to Education

	Effects of Federal Aid				
Sample/Group	Definitely Positive Pct.	Somewhat Positive Pct.	Benefits Equal Liabilities Pct.	More Trouble than Worth Pct.	No Response Pct.
Large District Sample	30.1	45.1	16.5	7.5	0.8
Randome Sample	22.2	34.0	25.3	17.6	1.0
Subgroups					
Enrollment:					
999 or less	18.4	31.5	26.3	22.3	1.4
1000 to 4999	24.1	38.2	23.0	14.3	0.4
5000 to 9999	30.6	29.4	25.9	12.9	1.2
10,000 to 24,999	34.9	20.9	39.5	2.3	2.3
25,000 and more	20.0	60.0	13.3	6.7	0.0
District type:					
Inner city/urban	32.9	26.5	27.1	3.5	0.0
Suburban	21.5	33.1	24.0	20.2	1.2
Rural	21.0	34.5	25.5	18.1	1.0

Slightly over three-fourths (75.2 percent) of the superintendents in the large district sample indicated that the effects of federal aid to education in their districts were either "definitely positive" or "somewhat positive" as compared to 56.2 percent of the superintendents in the random sample who responded in this manner. With but four exceptions, the larger the district, the more positive were superintendents' evaluations concerning the effects of federal aid to education. Superintendents in districts with enrollments of 999 or less were least inclined to hold positive views toward the effects of federal aid to education; 22.3 percent of these respondents indicated that federal aid "is more trouble than it is worth" and 26.3 percent indicated that "its benefits and liabilities have balanced out."

Homework

Table 11 shows respondent impressions regarding homework requirements in their school districts. With the exception of larger school districts, a majority of the superintendents polled felt that appropriate homework requirements existed within their districts; this was not true of superintendents in the large district sample where only 40.6 percent felt that such requirements were adequate nor in the 25,000 or more enrollment subgroup of the random sample where only 40.0 percent agreed that district homework requirements were sufficient.

Generally, slightly more than thirty percent of the random sample responses indicated that more homework should be required. In no instance did more than 3.1 percent of any respondent group indicate that less homework should be required.

Table 11 Superintendents' Views Regarding Homework Requirements

Sample/Group	About Right Pct.	More Needed Pct.	Less Needed Pct.	Undecided Pct.	No Response Pct.
Large District Sample	40.6	51.1	1.5	6.8	0.0
Random Sample	60.5	32.5	2.2	4.5	0.3
Subgroups					
Enrollment:					
999 or less	64.3	29.9	2.0	3.4	0.4
1000 to 4999	55.7	34.4	3.1	6.4	0.4
5000 to 9999	61.2	36.5	0.0	2.4	0.0
10,000 to 24,999	67.4	30.2	0.0	2.3	0.0
25,000 or more	40.0	53.3	0.0	6.7	0.0
District type:					
Inner city/urban	52.9	42.4	2.4	2.4	0.0
Suburban	61.6	29.3	2.9	5.4	0.8
Rural	60.9	32.4	2.0	4.5	0.3

Teacher Examinations

Superintendents' views regarding state board examinations as a requirement for entering the teaching profession are recorded in Table 12.

Table 12 Superintendents' Views Regarding State Board Examinations for Teachers

Sample/Group	Favor Pct.	Oppose Pct.	Undecided Pct.	No Response Pct.
Large District Sample	57.9	23.3	18.0	0.8
PROBE Random Sample	42.3	37.8	18.8	0.8
Gallup Poll	85	9	6	---
Random Sample Subgroups				
Enrollment:				
999 or less	34.6	43.6	20.5	1.3
1000 to 4999	46.5	35.3	17.8	0.4
5000 to 9999	55.3	25.9	18.8	0.0
10,000 to 24,999	65.1	20.9	14.0	0.0
25,000 or more	60.0	13.3	20.0	6.7
District type:				
Inner city/urban	56.5	21.2	22.4	0.0
Suburban	43.8	36.8	18.6	3.3
Rural	40.3	39.8	19.1	0.8

As can be noted in the table, the percentage of respondents who favored state board examinations exceeded the percentage who were opposed to this requirement in all groups of superintendents except in those districts with enrollments of 999 or less. Generally, the higher a district's enrollment, the more likely it was that the superintendents favored state board examinations as a requirement for entering the teaching profession. Rural district superintendents were quite evenly divided on this question; 40.3 percent favored such exams, 39.8 percent were opposed, and 19.1 percent were undecided.

PROBE's findings in this area were consistent with the lay opinions revealed by the 1979 Gallup Poll. However, the percentage of superintendents who favored such exams was less dominant--57.9 percent in large districts and 42.3 percent in the national sample favored them as compared to 85 percent of the respondents to the Gallup Poll who did.

Handicapped Education

Consistent with the Gallup Poll, superintendents who participated in the PROBE survey were asked how they would prefer to have mentally and physically handicapped younsters educated, in special classes or with other students. Some respondents objected to the fact that no opportunity was provided to opt for combination approaches such as "mainstreaming" but, due to the fact that the Gallup Poll provided only two alternatives, the options were thus restricted to promote comparability of results. The findings elicited by the items pertaining to this area are presented in Table 13.

Table 13 Superintendents' Views on Handicapped Education

	How the Handicapped Should Be Educated					
	Mentally Handicapped			Physically Handicapped		
Sample/Group	Special Classes	With Others	Undecided/ No Response	Special Classes	With Others	Undecided/ No Response
Large Districts	62.4	31.6	6.0	18.8	75.2	6.0
PROBE Random Sample	65.2	31.5	3.3	21.8	75.5	3.7
Gallup Poll	77	13	10	36	53	11
Random Sample Subgroups						
Enrollment:						
999 or less	66.8	30.8	2.3	23.8	73.9	2.3
1000 to 4999	64.3	31.4	4.4	21.9	75.4	2.6
5000 to 9999	63.5	35.3	1.2	12.9	85.9	1.2
10,000 to 24,999	58.1	37.2	4.7	11.6	83.7	4.7
25,000 or more	60.0	26.7	13.3	26.7	53.3	20.0
District type:						
Inner city/urban	65.8	29.4	4.7	31.8	63.5	4.7
Suburban	62.8	33.1	4.1	16.1	80.2	5.8
Rural	66.2	31.2	2.5	22.2	75.8	2.0

As shown in Table 13, all groups in the PROBE survey favored educating mentally handicapped youngsters in special classes by almost a two-to-one margin. Lay respondents to the Gallup Poll were even more in favor of special class options (77 percent for special classes vs. 13 percent for integrated educational opportunities).

Conversely, all groups in the PROBE survey favored the education of physically handicapped children with other students--generally, by about a three-to-one margin. Gallup Poll respondents also favored integrated educational opportunities for handicapped youngsters, but by a lesser margin (53 percent for vs. 36 percent against).

Discussion

Based on findings with random sample respondents in the PROBE Survey of District superintendents, the average public school superintendent in the United States:

.....is a male caucasian

.....holds a masters degree

.....is employed in a rural district

.....administers a combined elementary and secondary district that serves less than 5000 students

.....is employed in a town with a population of 2500 or less

.....feels that inflation and financial support are the district's most pressing problems

.....does not feel that a lack of discipline is a significant problem in in his district

.....would give his district's school a "B" for a letter grade

.....feels that today's schools (and their programs) are better than those to which he was exposed as a student

.....feels that increased financial support would do the most to improve his district's schools

.....feels that the effects of federal aid to education have been somewhat positive

.....believes that an appropriate amount of homework is required in his district's schools

.....would require teachers to pass state board examinations prior to entering the profession

.....would prefer to educate mentally handicapped youngsters in special classes

.....and would educate physically handicapped youngsters with other students

While superintendents representing districts of varying size agreed in most respects, comparisons of random sample and large district findings revealed certain differences between the average superintendents in the two samples. Representative of these differences, the average large district superintendent:

.....holds a doctoral degree

.....is employed in an urban district

.....administers a combined elementary and secondary district that serves over 25,000 students

.....is employed in a community with a population above 50,000

.....has a more positive attitude toward the effects of federal aid to education

.....thinks that more homework should be required in his district's schools

With these few exceptions, a high degree of similarity was found in the characteristics and views of the superintendents who participated in the PROBE Survey of District Superintendents and the various subgroups they represented.

Aside from the school district problems and their potential solutions identified by participants in the survey, among the more noteworthy findings was the fact that these problems were subject to very little influence by enrollment and other district characteristics. Major problems appear to affect small and large districts and rural, urban and suburban districts in like manners, and with almost equal severity.

Comparisons of PROBE findings regarding the problems confronting public schools with those of the Gallup Poll reveal that superintendents generally are more concerned with operational considerations--finance, governmental interference, facilities--whereas lay opinions give greater emphasis to what may be termed media sensations--lack of discipline, student drug usage, integration/bussing, crime and vandalism. However, the Gallup Poll's lay opinions did give due attention to financial considerations (ranked third), and both groups give nearly equal attention to pupils' lack of interest and the need to secure good teachers.

Disparities aside, a number of observations can be made about school finance, federal aid to education, teacher procural, and handicapped education from the findings of this study. The first of these will produce little shock among educators. First and foremost, across the nation and in almost all types of

districts, attention must be given to provisions for promoting more adequate financing for public schools. Secondly, efforts should be made to strip "red tape" and bothersome, ineffective regulations from federal aid to education programs and to make these resources available to smaller school districts on a more equitable basis. It is a fact of life that whenever application and reporting requirements are such that specialized personnel are needed to meet them, smaller districts are going to be at a distinct disadvantage in the competition for federal aid.

Regarding the problem of securing good teachers, it appears that more resources should be allocated to the promotion of improved teacher preparation--both at the preservice and inservice levels. Better pay and benefit plans also may serve to attract more talented persons into the profession and to prevent their attrition into more lucrative and attractive fields of endeavor.

Based on the findings of both the PROBE Survey of District Superintendents and the 1979 Gallup Poll, much remains to be done by advocates of handicapped education. If in fact "mainstreaming" is the way to go in the area of educating the mentally handicapped, a vast majority of school administrators and the lay public remain to be convinced. Persuading them otherwise remains a formidable task.

Based on their professional training and their direct involvement, it would appear that school officials generally would be a better source of information about school problems and effective potential solutions. This is not to suggest, however, that public opinion should be ignored in the process. In fact, public opinion may be a more appropriate form of evaluation in the examination of overall school effectiveness than the somewhat biased, introspective opinions of school officials. It also may serve as an important guiding force in school district improvement efforts.

Lay opinions regarding the problem of public education in America perhaps should not be taken at face value. It is the contention of the researchers that communication and/or public relations problems are major contributing factors in the disparities that appear to exist between professional and lay opinions on public school education. A concerted effort on the part of school officials to improve these aspects of their operations may well serve to narrow the gap between these two important bodies of opinion.

Unfortunately, public relations functions often must wait until after financial and operational considerations have been addressed. In these times

of inflation and financial pressure, public relations functions can easily be overlooked. Woe be those school systems which permit this to happen. One thing is certain: the chances that their problems will abate are nil.

Other PROBE Research

Copies of the complete survey report are available from PROBE, as are comparative reports of the findings for individual states which encompass 300 or more school districts.

PROBE also is in the process of conducting comparable research involving the perceptions of school principals, board members, PTA officers, school business officials, college and university presidents, and university academic officers. Findings will be released as they are available.

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